Chapter 7 Public Education and External Relations

7.1 Our role is to foster good governance by improving the standard of public administration. In this connection, it is essential to enhance understanding of our functions both in the community and within the public sector, to cultivate a positive service and complaints culture. We do so by sharing with them our investigation findings through media publicity and, for public officers, by an annual workshop as well as outreach talks.

7.2 At the international level, we take reference from Ombudsmen worldwide for refinement and further development of our own system. In return, we offer them our experience and share with them our practices.

Public Information

7.3 Our current publicity materials for TV and radio broadcast as well as those for display have been in use for years. We have reviewed and updated them this year. We have produced a new Announcement of Public Information (“API”) on the theme that The Ombudsman helps to clear obstacles between the community and Government departments/public bodies for fair and open, committed and accountable service. The new API will be launched in the coming year to foster better community-wide awareness.

7.4 We have also updated our fact sheet, publicity leaflet and booklet on “Tips for Making a Proper Complaint”. A new video has been produced to introduce our functions and powers. This is in three versions to meet the needs of different visitors: Cantonese, Putonghua and English.

7.5 Practically all our publicity materials including our Annual Reports and periodical *Ombuds News*, are posted on our website ***www.ombudsman.gov.hk*** for ready reference. The Ombudsman Ordinance is also in electronic format for public information. The website is updated regularly to keep pace with our development.

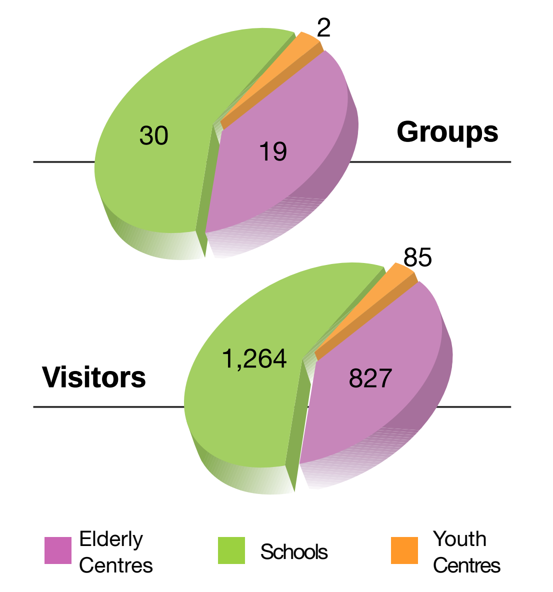
Resource Centre

7.6 Our Resource Centre offers a mini library, open to the public for access to Ombudsman-related publications, a full collection of our *Ombuds News*, video recordings and newsclips on our activities and annual reports of overseas Ombudsman offices. This year, we added 134 new publications to our stock.

7.7 At regular intervals, we invite groups from schools, youth and elderly centres to our Office as an experience in civic education. Such occasions normally comprise a visit to our Resource Centre, a briefing by our staff and an exchange of views. These sessions were attended by a total of 2,176 persons from 51 groups this year, compared to 2,033 and 42 respectively last year.

Fig. 7.1

Group Visits to Resource Centre



Media Relations

7.8 The Ombudsman Ordinance authorises The Ombudsman to publish investigation reports in the public interest. In this context, we organise press conferences every six to eight weeks to announce the results of our investigations into complaints or direct investigations. For complaint investigations, we select cases where the findings are relevant to a wide sector of our community. In all cases, we anonymise the complainants. To announce our press conference, we release our *Ombuds News*, which summarises our investigation findings. These newsletters are also available on our website.

7.9 This year, we announced the results of five direct investigations and two complaints investigated.

7.10 To maintain good working relationship for the promotion of quality public administration, The Ombudsman meets media members and receives interviews from time to time to share her experience with them.

Fig. 7.2

The Ombudsman at a Press Conference

Fig. 7.3

Press Conferences	
20 May 2004	• Announcement of findings of direct investigation into 2003 priority arrangements for surplus teachers in aided primary schools
30 June 2004	• Publication of 16th Annual Report • Announcement of findings of direct investigation into enforcement of the Building Management Ordinance • Declaration of direct investigation into administration of urn grave cemeteries
26 August 2004	• Announcement of findings of direct investigation into enforcement action on unauthorised building works in New Territories exempted houses • Declaration of direct investigation into administration of the Mid-Levels administrative moratorium
4 November 2004	• Announcement of findings of direct investigation into administration of urn grave cemeteries • Declaration of direct investigation into administrative arrangements for market stall auction
16 December 2004	• Announcement of findings of direct investigation into bloodworm incidents in public swimming pools

20 January 2005	• Declaration of direct investigation into supervision of property services agents by the Housing Department • Announcement of two anonymised complaints – against six departments for failing to resolve the problem of laundry drying in public places – against the Official Receiver's Office for delay in following up a report of bankruptcy offence

Meeting with Legislative Councillors

7.11 We keep close contact with community leaders and organisations to enlist their support for our work. The Ombudsman meets with Members of the Legislative Council at least annually, normally in December, to update them on the initiatives of the Office. In view of a number of recent public issues falling outside The Ombudsman's purview, Members have urged for early review of The Ombudsman's jurisdiction. Their concern is over the restrictions imposed by The Ombudsman Ordinance. Such review is in hand (see **Chapter 2**).

Fig. 7.4

JPs visiting the Immigration Department

Support from Justices of the Peace

7.12 Since the launch of our Justices of the Peace ("JPs") Assistance Scheme in 1996, 381 JPs have given their support for promoting the Ombudsman system. As a regular activity, we arrange for the JPs orientation visits to Government departments/public bodies to familiarise them with their operations and management. During the year, they visited the Fire Services Department, Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation West Rail and the Immigration Department. They appreciate those opportunities to sample and examine different facets of public administration.

Panels of Honorary Advisers

7.13 From time to time, we require expert assistance and professional advice for our investigations. Since 1994, The Ombudsman has appointed a panel of honorary advisers on a three-year term. They are specialists in their respective fields. The last term of appointment ended in December 2004. The advisers have responded warmly to The Ombudsman's invitation for service for a further term. The Ombudsman is grateful for their continued support.

7.14 A list of honorary advisers is at **Annex 13**.

The Ombudsman's Awards

7.15 The Ombudsman's Awards Scheme, launched in 1997, is meant to provide impetus for better public administration and quality services. They acknowledge Government departments, public bodies and public officers for their efforts in responding positively to complaints and eliminating administrative deficiencies through cooperation in our investigation.

7.16 Our presentation of The Ombudsman's Awards in August 2004 honoured 21 public officers from 18 organisations.

Fig. 7.5

The Ombudsman with winners of The Awards

Fig. 7.6

Winning Organisations for 2004

- Leisure and Cultural Services Department (Grand Award)
- Housing Department
- Social Welfare Department

Fig. 7.7

Individual Awards for 2004

Organisation	*Award*
Buildings Department	1
Civil Engineering and Development Department	1
Customs and Excise Department	1
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department	1
Hospital Authority	1
Housing Department	1
Immigration Department	2
Inland Revenue Department	2
Judiciary	1
Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority	1
Marine Department	1
Hongkong Post	1
Social Welfare Department	1
Student Financial Assistance Agency	1
Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority	1
Transport Department	2
Urban Renewal Authority	1
Water Supplies Department	1

7.17 From time to time, questions have been raised why organisations criticised for deficiencies in administration could still be awarded. Our focus is in fact on improvement over past performance. The aim is to encourage them to continue to do better.

7.18 Government departments and public bodies with a large and broad-based clientele, extensive powers and services related to the public's daily necessities invariably are more exposed to complaint. If their staff are in uniform and have enforcement duties, they would be even more easily identified for criticism. However, they should not be disregarded where they make special efforts and work with a proactive attitude to improve systems, resolve complaints and generally provide quality services. We award them also in appreciation of their cooperation with our Office in investigation and in implementation of our recommendations.

Complaint Management Workshop

7.19 We organise a Complaint Management Workshop each year for public officers to enhance professionalism in complaint handling among Government departments and public bodies. It offers opportunities for participants to share experience and to raise their concern with us direct.

7.20 This year, instead of focusing on the general principles of complaint handling and service delivery, we commissioned the ADR Chambers (HK) Limited to design and run a one-day workshop on "Communication with Complainants" in March 2005. This workshop, comprising lectures, games and role-play, aimed to provide personal development training for participants familiar with or in charge of complaint handling. Given the interactive nature of the workshop, the number of participants had to be restricted to about 100 instead of the much larger number before. The Ombudsman personally considered each and every nomination from each organisation to ensure that maximum benefits would be derived.

7.21 After the event, participants highly rated the workshop. Most of them considered it to have enhanced their understanding on negotiation and mediation, thus strengthening their confidence for liaison with complainants. They reaffirmed their readiness to share the experience with their colleagues.

Fig. 7.8

Representative of ADR Chambers (HK) Limited explaining the role of negotiation in resolving disputes at the Complaint Management Workshop

Seminars for Target Groups

7.22 Apart from contact with the general public, we have targetted our liaison to specific groups in the community. As social workers and assistants of Legislative Councillors and District Councillors constitute a significant source of complaint referrals, we organised two seminars for them in October 2004 and January 2005. We aimed to enhance their understanding of our role, our jurisdiction and work procedures. The seminars were well attended by about 200 participants.

Fig. 7.9

Our colleagues sharing experiences on complaint handling with social workers at the seminar

Outreach Talks

7.23 More and more public officers are aware that complaint handling is an integral part of public service, indeed often a reminder for improvement. To meet their operational needs, we conduct talks and organise training sessions. This year, we delivered seven talks to Government departments and universities. Our senior officers introduced the functions of our Office, answered questions on our operations and shared experience with them.

Institutional Liaison

7.24 The Hong Kong Ombudsman is a member of the International Ombudsman Institute ("IOI") and a founding member of the Asian Ombudsman Association ("AOA"). In September 2004, The Ombudsman was re-elected as the Secretary of IOI. Currently, The Ombudsman is the Secretary of both organisations. The Ombudsman participates actively in their activities as institutional liaison is crucial to the professional development of an effective ombudsman system. I shall have the honour of hosting the 9th AOA Conference in Hong Kong in November 2005.

7.25 The duty visits and conferences that I attended in 2004 are listed in **Annex 15**.

Exchanges with the Mainland

7.26 We have developed an exchange programme with the China Supervision Institute since 1996, comprising visits in alternate years. In early November 2004, a ten-member delegation of the Institute visited Hong Kong for seven days. During the period, we arranged visits for them to Government departments and public bodies for first-hand contact with the local legal and administrative systems. We treasure these opportunities for enhancing mutual understanding. Next year, The Ombudsman will lead a small group on a reciprocal visit to the Mainland.

Fig. 7.10

The Ombudsman with delegates of the China Supervision Institute

7.27 Often, groups from the Mainland come to us for understanding the ombudsman system and our jurisdiction. During the reporting period, we delivered talks to ten groups comprising 113 participants.

7.28 A list of these group visits to our Office is at **Annex 14**.

Opinion Survey

7.29 We conduct surveys from time to time to collect views from the public for review and improvement of our services. Last year, we reported that a thematic household survey had been completed through the Census and Statistics Department. The findings have helped tailor our community relations strategy. For example, the survey found the public less aware of my authority to initiate investigation even without complaints. We have since focused more on publicising our direct investigations. It is apparent that public awareness of our direct investigation function has thus been enhanced (see **Chapter 3**).

7.30 We value public comments, in particular, those from our clients. In April to June 2004, we launched an anonymised survey to gauge their expectations so as to refine our services and revise our procedures where appropriate. Out of the 827 clients approached, 260 responded, meaning a 31.5% response rate. Most respondents were generally satisfied with our service. However, we were able to distill from the findings aspects for improvement to our practices.